

The Washington Post _____
 The New York Times _____
 The Washington Times _____
 The Wall Street Journal _____
 The Christian Science Monitor _____
 New York Daily News 14C _____
 USA Today _____
 The Chicago Tribune _____
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A spy retires

William Webster's retirement as director of the CIA comes at a critical moment in that organization's checkered history. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union as an empire, the focus of American intelligence must become wider. Spying on the Soviets will remain a key function of the CIA. Mikhail Gorbachev is still in charge of the world's second-largest nuclear arsenal. But if The Bomb ever goes off, chances are that the button will be pushed not by Gorbachev but by a Saddam-type Third World dictator. In intelligence, as in so much else, the 21st century has already arrived.

All of which points to the signal importance of William Webster's legacy: He overcame much of the public distrust stirred up by the Iran-Contra affair and enhanced the CIA's credibility. The value of that achievement cannot be overstated. Yes, it's essential that the CIA know who's about to do what to whom. But it's no less essential that high government officials believe the CIA when it tells them who's about to do what to whom. Webster's housecleaning was a vital step toward that goal.